

Montana Wind Working Group

Draft minutes, July 11, 2003

A meeting was held July 11, 2003, in the Secretary of State's office to initiate a Montana Wind Working Group (WWG). This WWG, one of many being formed in states around the country, would be a successor to the renewable energy discussion group that Secretary of State Bob Brown had been hosting over the previous two years.

Mark Hines, Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) – Circulated a copy of the State Wind Working Group Handbook that he received from Wind Powering America at the American Wind Energy Association meeting in Austin, Texas, last May. Participants at the meeting reviewed its contents and determined it could be useful in promoting the wind energy message in Montana. The WWG felt these materials should be made more broadly available. The group agreed to have additional copies of the handbook printed so more people would have it. Also, DEQ agreed that the PowerPoint presentations on the CD should be posted on their website and others so that they are available to more people to use when addressing groups on wind energy matters.

Ron Lehr, American Wind Energy Association (AWEA) Western Representative – Said he is a big believer in success leading to success. The Wind Working Group (WWG) is a good way to develop “participation equity” which he likened to sweat equity. In response to a question about available curriculum, Ron suggested www.irec.org (www.irecusa.org?) has a potential website for materials to educate K-12 students on the benefits of wind. Ron said Iowa had installed small wind turbines near schools to help children recognize the potential for generating power from wind. The Iowa Spirit Lake example and the advisability of contacting Tom Wind were discussed. Ron noted there is no limit on net-metering in Iowa.

Ron suggested the WWG could help to integrate utility and other efforts to promote wind energy development so there is no duplication of efforts. He gave as an example the Colorado Energy Forum, a place where Colorado was attempting to build alliances:

- Worked on areas where they could agree
- Didn't work on their disagreements; agreed to disagree
- Started by putting other state examples on the table and eventually there wasn't room on the agenda for other state examples
- Fought in other forums

Ron recommended that the form of WWG follow function, but some obvious groups to include in the membership are:

- Landowners
- Utilities
- Montana Rural Electric Coops (contact Gary Wiens)
- Labor groups
- Farm organizations
- Bob Brown/state land board
- Regulatory agencies that would issue permits for wind

With Ron's comments in mind, the group thought we should begin to identify the outcomes the Montana WWG might want to pursue, such as:

- Rural sustainability
- Economic development
- Environmental benefits
- Project management function for smaller, more focused WWG activities with different people responsible for different components

Some specific tasks to consider are:

- Assess Montana incentives (listed on the DEQ website). How useful are the tools we have when developers attempt to use them?
- Get agencies to speak with one voice; improve coordination. James Carkulis, a developer) says he has five different opinions from DOR on SB138 on tax implications
- Should look at large, small and mid-size wind options, but the focus probably should be on commercial size wind rather than small
- Study the cost and need for ancillary services. This should be done statewide rather than just in NorthWestern Energy service territory
- Look at variation in costs to the buying utility system of the same power product from different sized developments; substitute information on costs for old conventional wisdom
- Grassroots organizing
- Clearinghouse for information
- Policy review and development
- Take advantage of existing organizations and website (coordination rather than separate group)

Do we need a WWG in Montana? The group thought we could use a WWG in Montana as a launch for large wind and then turn its functions over to a group like the Montana Renewable Energy Association once large wind was routine in the state and had more of a business footing.

The group discussed whether it wanted to help develop a wind event in conjunction with the Wheeler Center transmission workshop this fall. Participants thought a roundtable with focused dialogues would be helpful to build on the transmission presentations from the Center's workshop. The group was not interested in another day of presentations by "talking heads", preferring pointed discussing with potential wholesale purchasers, transmission system operators, industry representatives and local advocates to sort out the details of how to make a wind project work in Montana, how to access out-of-state markets and how to overcome whatever barriers seem to be holding Montana wind development back. The group suggested assembling knowledgeable people from the following:

- PacifiCorp, a potential large buyer based on their IRP filing and a transmission owner in Montana
- AWEA, an industry group that monitors utility purchases and posts opportunities

- NorthWestern, Bonneville Power or the NWPPC who have a broader perspective on unfolding events in the region.

It would be useful to identify areas within Montana where wind can be developed and moved, the details of how to make transactions work in these localities, and the buying appetite for wind over the next several years.